

THE ONLY CHILD OF AN ATOMIC ENGINEER

My Journey From Playful
Beginnings To Published
Writer

By

Thomas Wilson Pratt Slatin

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The Only Child Of An Atomic Engineer

These are my memories, from my perspective, and I have tried to represent events as faithfully as possible. To maintain the anonymity of the individuals involved, I have changed or omitted some details.

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Preface and About The Author written by Amelia
Phoenix Desertsong.

TomSlatin.com
tom@tomslatin.com

ThePhoenixDesertsong.com
amelia@tomslatin.com

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Printed in The United States of America by Barnes
& Noble Press, New York City.

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The Only Child Of An Atomic Engineer

To my wife Amelia, who loves me
unconditionally, and who believes in me.

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Preface

In 1998, Thomas Slatin embarked on a journey that was simply not often thought of back before the turn of the twenty-first century. Sure, plenty of people started websites back then, but often in the hopes for a quick buck. So, to say Thomas was ahead of his time was an understatement. As a long-time photographer who had already been honing his craft for over a decade, he saw an opportunity to share his photography with the World Wide Web. Even more important to Thomas, though, was the opportunity to share his true passion, his writings.

Thomas and I crossed paths casually a couple of years back on Twitter before I had gone on a long social media hiatus due to family matters and people generally being stupid. Back then, I had thought Thomas was just a professional photographer who dabbled in creative journalistic nonfiction. It did not occur to me that writing was as much a passion of his as photography.

Reading through several of his articles, I could tell that he was an especially talented writer who had been long toiling at his craft. But, he seemed to be looking backward far too often, something I have done myself on many occasions. I asked myself,

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what if he were to project forward how much his already beautiful writing might evolve?

While Thomas has dabbled in journalism and even poetry at a time, creative nonfiction is truly his bread and butter. Without a doubt, his writing has always been good, but there is no doubt that he reached new heights with writing one of the most beautiful pieces I had ever read called *A Little Ghost For The Offering*.

I come across plenty of outstanding writing every so often, even on online threads as commonplace as a Twitter writer's lift. But, there was a special level of care taken with this piece and the emotions were easily palpable as I read it. The narration provided by British author Kai only enhanced the experience. After reading this piece, I made it a point to better know this man, Thomas Slatin. Even though we had casually known each other for a while, it was particularly important to me to get to know what made him such a special writer.

As it turned out, my initial impressions about his writing style were correct. I had assumed he had been influenced by beat generation writers like Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, authors who had certainly influences on my own work over the years. Not only were they influences, but Allen Ginsberg himself personally mentored Thomas! It was

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Ginsberg who saw legendary writer potential in Thomas from an early age. While I certainly could see the potential now, having a legend like Ginsberg tell him that and personally show him the tricks of his trade is priceless!

Thomas and I began to talk intensely in the year 2020. COVID-19 really had hit both of our creative efforts awfully hard. We were both dealing with many different issues in our lives and both of us had a lot of things to work through. It turned out that we have almost identical personalities, with mine being more extroverted to his being introverted. We got along famously within a truly short time and became close personal friends. It then became our mutual life purpose to help the other find a crazy high level of success. Thomas helped me to raise my own standards to brand new heights and I made him realize that Allen Ginsberg was right about him.

I feel honored to have my words serve as the preface to what I believe is the culmination of blood, sweat, and tears that have long gone mostly unrecognized. While his photography has won awards, and it is truly brilliant to be sure, Thomas' writing is what truly drew me to him. Thomas has the most beautiful soul I have ever met in another human being – man, woman, or non-binary. Not only has he helped me to take my own writing to

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another level, but he has helped me become the best possible person I can be.

I am so honored to know this man Thomas Slatin and have him as my best friend. It is amazing how life works sometimes, to take two people that feel lost and at a difficult crossroads, and somehow get them standing side by side seemingly by completely random chance. Without a doubt, there are certain things that do happen for a reason. But oftentimes our own free will leaves us with a choice that we cannot possibly appreciate in the moments we are forced to make them.

Fortunately, for Thomas and me, we made the right choice to partner up and make one another stronger. Sometimes, in moments of great weakness, we finally dig into the deepest recesses of our hearts and pull out our absolute best stuff. It is my greatest honor to be a part of a work that will prove the point that Allen Ginsberg made all those years ago. In *The Only Child Of An Atomic Engineer*, you will watch Thomas grow as a writer all the way to now. Through the years of entries, you will see how geniuses are certainly born, but legends are made through the tireless, painstaking toils of an indomitable spirit.

Writing can take you places that perhaps no other art can. It can help you meet people you could not have dreamed of ever meeting before. So, if you

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take just one thing away from this tremendous tome of wisdom and sense, let it be this: writing is perhaps the hardest profession there is, but just as with anything else, success is there for those who never give up.

— Amelia Phoenix Desertsong
ThePhoenixDesertsong.com

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Introduction

When I was younger, I used to write in riddles, and I used to write in rhymes. I thought that by doing so, that I might capture the attention of my reader. I never anticipated I would be writing for a specific audience; I wrote the way I felt in my heart and soul to be true, not realizing or accepting the fact that while patience might be common, intellect is not. Perhaps the true meaning behind my words might never be revealed, instead blinded by the way they were written.

I used to write in sketchbooks with plain white pages, always in blue ink, and always in very tiny handwriting. There was no rhyme or rhythm to my writing, just random thoughts and accounts of the day's events, filled with cryptic references, painting a picture akin to a ghost into a fog.

I had documented a substantial amount of my life during the early 1990's, though as it turns out, it was a complete and total waste of my time. I wish I had spent my time more wisely, taking more pictures and taking my writing more seriously.

When we are young, we have a vastly different view about how the world really works. I always knew I wanted to be a writer, but some

dreams appear to be abstract. In a world full of people with very concrete goals, becoming a writer is something that seems obscure and unusual to most. I believed to become a writer, one would have to write at least one book, and typical of being young and naive, I thought that my cryptic journal entries would one day parlay into a national bestseller.

Never could I have imagined at such a young and unworldly age that becoming a writer would be a multi-step process; twists and turns, setbacks, and disappointments, made more fleeting by being forced to work in various and unrelated career paths. It is difficult to relate to those around me who attended college and universities with a clear, tangible goal in mind, for which their education was specifically tailored for.

Whenever someone asks me what I do for a living, I cringe. It is difficult to explain what a writer does, though the product remains the same; written words, either printed on paper, or through some electronic medium, written for the consumption, entertainment, and/or enlightenment of the reader. The process from inspiration to finished product is immensely complicated, and even more difficult to explain.

From an exceedingly early age, my parents encouraged me to seek a career in something considered by most to be prestigious. Their dream

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was for their only child to become a businessman. When I started my first year in college and wrote against capitalism, their back-up plan was for me to become a doctor. So, I studied anatomy, physiology, and emergency medicine, but outside interests and curiosities made me question what I wanted to study. My true passion was writing. I can clearly remember my father lecturing me about how, as he put it, "you will never make a single dime by writing."

He was wrong.

As time went on, it became clear that I was someone who might never possess a true calling. In other words, I was a multipotentialite, following my dreams and interests both vocationally and in life. The obvious career for me was to be a writer, photographer, and website designer; while not always considered prestigious or glamorous, combining these skills into one business venture that has always been something I have been passionate about.

I started keeping a journal around age 8, but since the start, I always censored myself, never being completely honest, and leaving out any mention of emotions or what I was feeling. I noted only events, happenings, ideas, and plans; where I had been, what I had seen, heard, experienced, and where I dreamed of going next. I always focus on the past; what was, what could have been, what should

have been. I have always been terrified of someone reading my journal for fear of being judged.

I never really opened myself to anybody; I never told the entire story of my life to anyone, only a thumbnail view of how my life and feelings really are. So much hidden behind blue eyes; so much of my existence constantly shrouded in mystery. The only person who really knows me for who I really am is Amelia; it is she who knows and sees me, it is her who does not judge, her who sees the painful secrets I keep hidden from everyone else.

My writing journal has always taken a birds-eye-view of my life. From an early age, I would use my writing as a means of dealing with emotional upset; obsessively organizing and categorizing my pain. I constantly questioned everything through my writing, trying to sort through things to find meaning and sense behind every experience, though many experiences defied any sense or explanation. In my journals I often ruminate over my unhappiness, going over all the painful memories of childhood, in a futile attempt at trying to re-examine and re-write the past.

Amelia is the only person who has ever read my journals from start to finish. I was anticipating her reaction to be one of rejection, or worse, an end to our relationship. But instead, she accepted what I had written in my journals as the past. In many

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ways, it made our relationship stronger; I knew I was able to tell her anything, no matter how intimate, and she would never judge it.

In the past, I toyed with the idea of writing a tell-all memoir about my childhood, specifically naming, if not flat-out placing the blame on those responsible. But what would I get? Would I get revenge? Or would I simply educate those who read it that everyone goes through some sort of emotional trauma in their lives, and although you learn through mistakes, despite sincere apologies, revenge, and retribution for what happened to us, as much as we try to forgive and forget, the past will never be undone.

Sometimes I feel as if I am lost in the pages of a book about my own life, filled with the jaded ramblings of a madman. The world is not as it seems like arcane symbolism seeks the truth of higher meaning.

My written words are sometimes a nightmare to those who are not like me, or those who are unamused by difference, unable to shift focus or perspective, seeing the world only as they are told or taught to see it. Life is ours; we live it our way, and we write our own story as life goes on.

The older I get, the more I realize how the world works, and how many things in life are based

on illusions accepted as real by those trapped through common thought. We live in a world controlled through politics and religion. Throughout human history we have witnessed the persecution of differences.

Those who scare me are the ones who are drunk on religious beliefs. Religion preaches lies that are meant to psychologically trap its followers. The notion that we are created broken or our only hope of salvation or getting into heaven requires regular religious attendance and/or monetary contribution. I reject modern religion for a multitude of reasons, but if I had to specify my beliefs, I would say that I am Pagan.

My idea of heaven is for my spirit to ride upon the shoulder of a black-winged bird. Writing was my true salvation, and this book represents the culmination of my best selected pieces so far.

"When I was a child, I would dream in black and white. Only a small fraction of my dreams would be in color, to match normal perception of day, respectively. And yet there is something beautiful

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about black and white dreams. They are often mysterious as the characters generally fade into one's perception much like silhouettes, or a ghost coming towards oneself walking out of a cover of fog. For reasons I cannot explain, as an adult, the vast majority of my dreams are in vivid color, the complete opposite of those I had during my childhood."—Thomas Wilson Pratt Slatin

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Inconceivable

When I was a child, my father took me to see something he was working on. It was something so amazing that it was inconceivable for me to truly comprehend as an eight-year-old child.

After a long car ride, we checked in with the front desk secretary, and a visitor badge was issued to me. My father and I then walked down a series of long hallways until finally, we stopped at a set of large double doors. At this point, my father simply said, "Here it is", as he slowly opened the door.

Then, suddenly, there it was: a gigantic industrial art robot which used an oversized and automated gantry crane, a series of motors, hydraulically powered jaws to randomly lift and place 1-ton industrial cylinders filled with concrete.

The machine was massive in size and painted in a very high-gloss canary yellow. My father told me the machine was programmed to always have the four spaces occupied with cylinders. But since there were only three cylinders for the four available spaces, it would constantly pick up and place any available cylinder at random to try and keep every space occupied.

The crane was controlled by a computer system the size of a refrigerator, its enclosure an identical color, adorned with a protective front metal grate which bore a distinctive high voltage sign.

I was fascinated by the impressive feat of modern engineering, almost as if simply by standing in front of something that big, at that moment I could not see or think about anything else at all.

There is something captivating about moving machinery. Machines are generally designed to perform a certain task, whether it be to produce a product, handle material in a certain way, or to automate certain tasks. It was for the very first time in my life that I was observing a machine designed to captivate, astound, and fascinate. Its massive size and complexity made me feel a multitude of emotions; everything from wonder, to amazement, and even a hint of anxiety when I wondered what might happen if, by some remote chance that there were to be a failure. If something unexpected should occur, one of these massive concrete cylinders might fall and cause injury to someone.

Sensing my fear, my father assured me that everything was safe with that, I decided to move closer to the machine to get a better sense of how it worked. Standing just behind the safety fence, I observed the machine pick up a cylinder high above

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the others, move it a considerable distance, and then set it down. The machine itself worked in surprisingly fast manner, and I remember being able to feel the shock from the poured concrete floor I was standing on every time a cylinder was placed. The machine seemed to work tirelessly, repeatedly trying to fill the empty space with nearby cylinders, not realizing of course, that there was simply one too few to have all the spaces occupied.

It has been many years since that day. My father realized that his time was fleeting, and in the months before my father passed away, I tried to document the tiny and seemingly insignificant details of my childhood memories and experiences with his help. I wanted to collect snapshots and memories of things that I remembered from my childhood that I had not documented. But the years had not been a friend to my father, and often he would forget the details I was searching for, or to offer contradictions, as his memory tried to piece together events which happened decades ago.

As all that is in the past now, I cherish what moments we shared together and have come to accept that what we remember best is all that really matters.

It is inconceivable how much we inevitably forget about our lives and even more so what we end up remembering when all is said and done.

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It's Been Awhile Since I've Dreamed This Much

Today the sun came up, painted the landscape golden, and brought with it the brilliant light of morning. I woke up, got out of bed, and opened the window shades. Outside was another typical ordinary morning.

I have not been sleeping much these past few days, yet it has been a while since I have dreamed this much. Summoned by abstract dreams and sirens calling with empty promises, I realized that one must never lock up something that they wished to see thrive. As I looked out the window a finch landed on the windowsill edge. He was truly something to observe, so small and fragile; innocently hopping around, going about his morning.

I always write in the brilliant light of the morning, yet I do not know what to say the remainder of the day.

I threw up my sails and let the four winds carry me through the sea of life, unsure of which direction I would travel, further unsure of where I would end up. I heard white noise, as I surrendered up my body. And as the artist awakens, I think I'm

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going to cry. Feeling my time is short, I realized I was living in silence for far too long, observing life from a distance. But nothing ever changes when you view it from the sky; one must accept the damage and the wreckage as earth just passes by.

There was one moment forever lost in time and now only exists in my mind, a snapshot resurfacing of long ago I was a child, standing in the doorway to the kitchen and seated at a table was Allen Ginsberg. A pot was gently boiling on the stove behind him, his lunch a simple one. His eyes were clearly keen, focused upon several perfectly aligned stacks of white pages of poetry and written prose sitting on the table. He would spend several minutes meticulously organizing these stacks as I patiently waited, moving those pages into many different orders, as if he were trying to solve some puzzle. As the stacks slowly merged into one large stack, he retrieved a cardboard box from underneath the table, carefully and expertly aligning the pages into a uniform brick, before gently sliding the compendium into its container.

When Allen was finished, he took a deep breath, letting out a long and satisfying sigh of relief, folded his hands upon the table, smiled, and gazed to the ceiling. He did not notice me at first until several moments had passed and he became satisfied with the moment of silence.

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Then suddenly, his eyes adjusted to the change in distance, and he gazed into my eyes as I was transfixed as I watched the master at his craft. Allen invited me to sit at the table across from him and he began to speak to me about what I wanted to do with my life. He took out a sheet of blank typing paper and with a sharpened pencil began to scribble down some notes. Adjectives, descriptions, words, and little bits of the contents of his head and narratives of current events.

I did not know it at the time, but Allen was indeed training his young apprentice in the writing trade. With his tired and elderly hands, he slowly and gently slid the paper across the smooth and dark polished surface of the antique kitchen table and encouraged me to read it. I was lost at the time, not realizing until decades later that this technique inspired me to write and gave me the critical practice of keeping a writing notebook. His dreams had all come to fruition, his life had a purpose.

I do not know that which I truly possess, nor its value and importance until it is gone. I do not know whom to love until after they are lost forever. And I do not know how I should feel until long after the moment has passed.

Allen was a legend. Now it is my turn to be a legend.

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Snapshots And Memories And Days Of My Youth

When I was a child, my friends and I would ride our bicycles to the end of town, and they would wait and gaze at an old mansion where the sidewalk ends. The old mansion, with its old architectural facets, almost as if it came from a time warp of a much earlier time. At the time, none of us knew who lived at the house, though there were rumored to have been an elderly couple living there.

One day curiosity got the best of us and my friends dared me to knock at the front door so that when the elderly couple answered, we would know for sure that the rumor were true. Several times I would walk up to the front door and knock, and although the door would always be unlocked, nobody ever came to answer.

This experience, like most of my childhood was focused on adventure and wonder, and of things unseen or simply ignored and overlooked by most.

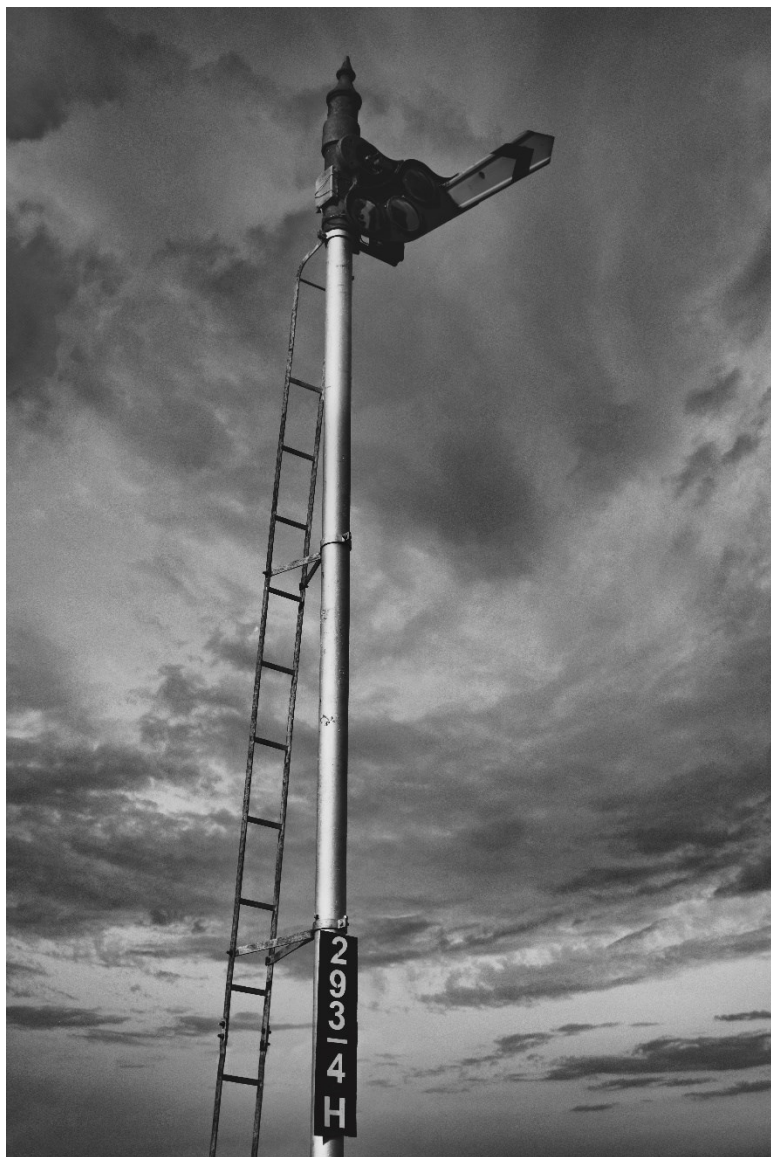
In recent times I have been drawn to the locations which played pivotal roles in my development, and therefore remind me of my younger days. The draw to these places is magnetic,

though obscure and unexplainable. Perhaps it is out of sheer curiosity, or perhaps I revisit just to see what has changed since childhood. The changes that occur often happen slowly, hardly noticeable, and from my perspective, nothing ever changes. Instead, it is only me who has changed; I lived, I grew, I changed. I am a completely different person now than when I first visited this old house, now close to thirty years ago. Thoughts of my experiences from childhood dance on a stage of memories, as I thought of all the times my friends and I would visit this place, knock on the door, and eventually leave without an answer.

I still remember being a small child growing up in a great big world, especially the many times I sat alone in the school yard daydreaming and writing down plans for how my life would be. I always needed time on my own; time to reflect, time to write, and time to dream; these were the snapshots and memories, and days of my youth.

When I was a child, I spent most of my time focused on my future, whereas as an adult, I spend most of my time wondering just how I came to become the person that I am today. It seems that over the years, the one thing that remains constant is my quiet curiosity, my need for constant intellectual stimulation, personal reflection, and my desire for new experiences and adventure.

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They Came And Wrote Things Down On Paper

When I was in grade school, at the request of my parents, the school guidance counselor agreed to perform a series of scholastic tests to see if I would be a better fit for more advanced classes. Several days later the counselor decided to run the same series of tests again, then two weeks passed, and they were run a third time. Then came a letter to my parents, which requested a private meeting. I still remember waiting in the school hallway during lunch period outside the guidance counselor's door, anxiously waiting for the test results while my parents were discussing them.

Suddenly it was my turn, and I was quickly ushered into the office. To my surprise, as well as the delight of my parents, I scored years ahead of my current classes in the areas of English, Science, and Technology. Unfortunately, my parents refused to allow me to advance to those advanced classes simply fearing that I might be separated from my own age group of peers. Instead of advanced classes, the school guidance counselor suggested that I might be a good fit for a study group at a local college where I could be scholastically tested and studied by professors and educators.

My parents agreed, and I was chosen, along with a friend of mine from the same school, to participate in the college research study. At the time we were the only two students picked from our school to attend.

When I arrived, the research classroom at the college was strange, almost alien to me. It was set up like a kindergarten, with aqua blue carpeting, plain walls covered in high gloss white paint, and bright fluorescent lights. There were toys in containers in almost every corner, and a low-standing white table with a box of markers sat in the middle of the room. At first appearances, it seemed as if I might have been assigned to the wrong study group.

A teacher greeted us as we walked in. Adjacent to the main classroom was a hallway with two small rooms off to one side, both brightly lit with a large window in the door. I was immediately ushered into a small, cramped room, furnished only with a table and two chairs. The room was plain, its walls covered with wooden paneling and hastily applied varnish reminded me of an interrogation room from a 1980's police detective movie. There was only one door, which barely had enough room to open fully before contacting the back of one of the chairs.

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The table was against a large panel of one-way glass. I knew right away that there would be an unknown party observing the proceeding quizzes, and tests, and other lessons, and I made the mistake of stating my observation to the examiner.

"You're not like the others", the examiner said, impressed yet at the same time pessimistic, motioning his hand in as if to signal someone to join us in the already cramped room.

Almost immediately the door opened, followed by a small handful of college graduate students, many of which were in their late 20's. The students came in, observed everything I did, asked me questions about my schooling, and wrote various things down on paper. I was given various things to read as well as some activities which loosely resembled IQ testing materials. Repeatedly the examiner and the students asked for my thoughts and opinions, furiously writing down everything I said.

If I said I did not know, someone would remind me that there were no wrong answers. I was glad when they left, they brought nothing but troubling anxiety.

The experience was. I simply could not comprehend why adults would take such an interest in my childhood thoughts and opinions of

schoolwork and learning. For several weeks I spent Fridays after school visiting the research center. Sometimes I would bring in a homework assignment to complete, other times I would be given a puzzle or maze to solve. On one occasion I spent the entire time discussing and drawing electrical diagrams. It all seemed overwhelming and bizarre to me at the time, and looking back on it now as an adult, I am still at a loss for an explanation.

Desideratum

When I think of the places I used to know, the locations where keyframe events in my life took place, I feel desideratum. It is almost as if there is a feeling of loss, or grief for something lost, as if in that moment I was part of something I cannot see. Forever lost, though completely intangible and metaphysical at best. The heartbreaking reality is the knowledge that most of these places I might never see again. These places helped raise me and will forever be an integral facet of my past, complete with memories and still frames in my mind of an earlier time in life when I was still young and naive.

Life will hurt, life will break your heart, and life will test your will. Yet regardless how broken our bodies and spirits become, the insatiable desire to live remains. In my life I have neglected to give myself enough time for every emotion; I have been guilty of never allowing myself enough time to laugh, to celebrate, to cry, or to genuinely appreciate the experience of moments before they simply passed me by.

I never thought that in my life I would have become successful. Never did it occur to me that one day I would become an influencer; a person

who would be asked what specific camera they used most often, or the brand of notebook they filled with handwritten prose.

The majority of plans I spent the duration of my childhood documenting never came to be. Those that came to fruition often required a significantly longer period than I had originally hoped. It is interesting how one's perspective changes as we grow older. Our minds are always changing; our choices and decisions always half-chance, some of which seem fool hardy in retrospect. When I was a child, I had made plans which detailed exactly when things were to happen, disregarding any external factors which might have forced me to adapt or abandon those plans altogether.

The older I get, the memories and experiences of my youth grow exponentially more precious, though constantly fleeting as I attempt to make time to document these memories before they are lost forever.

It seems the older I get, the more of an enigma I become, as if I am the keeper of obscure and seldom known facts, the lion share of which people rarely think about and never pursue. Similarly, are the places I long to return to; places people seldom think of, and never visit. In my

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quotidian life, there is always someplace I would rather be. It is a paradox of sorts as in the physical sense I cannot leave though I know I cannot stay; a stranger in my own life who daydreams of moments in life in a feeble attempt to relive those experiences vicariously through one's own imagination.

Memories akin to imaginary possessions that are sometimes lost, abandoned, or intentionally forgotten, the emotional attachment with long-lost locations sometimes themselves, becomes an insatiable obsession.

It feels like just yesterday I was a child playing with dinosaurs in my room on a Sunday morning. I clearly remember writing my very first journal entry at age eight, and how I had set up my own writing space in an unused walk-in closet of my bedroom. I often wish I could return to those times, if only for a day to tell my younger self that no matter what I will have to go through in my life, the wounds will all heal in time.

There are so many things I wish I would have done differently, so many careless mistakes I had made, so many missed opportunities, and so many times I tried to speak out and no one would hear me.

Where did the time go, and where were the places I so vividly remember, now completely unrecognizable, after a lifetime ago?

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Maybe

When I was a child, I thought that when I grew up, that all my picture-perfect maps and plans of the future would come true. Yet, very few of those plans I was certain and convinced would come true actually did. But what if things turned out differently? Maybe I would have been famous. Maybe I would have been successful. Maybe I would have chased dreams like those around me.

For a while, I thought that fame, success, and obsessing over the tiny details and materialistic things in life were what really mattered. That was the message that was instilled in my mind ever since I can remember. It took a considerable, almost unfathomable amount of time for me to concluded that there are things in life that are paramount over everything else. Doing good work, making time for friends and loved ones, and trying to make the world a better, more accepting place.

And yet, despite all that I have done to preach fairness and equality, it remains a very cruel, competitive, and unfair world. A world where very few people get what they deserve, and even if they are able to attain the things that they spent a lifetime to achieve, those sometimes-insignificant

rewards can be lost forever at a moment's notice, sometimes through an act of natural disaster, but more often as a result of the selfish action of others.

In my life, it seems that my life has been an uphill battle ever since I was a child. Trials and tribulations, and roadblocks always getting in the way of the things I should have achieved, could have achieved, or realized that the prize was no longer worth the time and effort and abandoned the pursuits altogether. There have been many times in my life when I felt as if I was at a dead end, at a point of no return, when I was faced with a crossroads, waiting on a decision on which path in life I wished to take next. Yet, after I made those countless decisions in my life as to the next path or course I wished to embark upon, I constantly second-guessed those choices.

There is an unnecessary amount of judgment, comparison, and competition in modern society, and it is unhealthy. I dream of a world where all people are allowed the same opportunities and given fair and equal treatment. It seems in modern society, same as it was a millennia ago, we still are able to somehow morally and socially justify a reason to find differences in others, then use those differences against one another through discrimination and prejudice to advance ourselves unfairly.

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It has been my experience that regardless of what laws, regulations, and standards are progressed, upheld, and enforced, there is just no changing the already made-up minds of a few who seek to turn back the clock to an earlier, more oppressive time.

I wish that growing up I had been taught the true value of happiness. If one cannot be happy with the way things are, their possessions, and time spent with loved ones, then what really is the value of one's life? I wish that I was taught that as an adult, I should make time to deal with the mixed emotions of adulthood, and to make time to experience, express, and cherish those emotions, both good and bad. I wish someone had told me we must make time to laugh, to cry, and to appreciate and cherish the things we have and the people whom we love, and perhaps more importantly, those who love us.

Modern society in and of itself is in a chaotic downward spiral where possessions are being loved and cherished, instead of people, meanwhile, people are being used, taken for granted, and treated poorly. It seems that every day there is another person who has turned to violence because they felt as if they were not being heard. There have been a multitude of times in my life when I tried to speak out, but it seemed as if no one could hear me. But instead of turning to violence, I turned to

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writing; speech is often futile and fleeting, while the written word can often last much longer and often gets through eventually in such a way to fulfill the need.

Addicted To A Certain Kind Of Sadness

Lately I have found that there is a longing to visit locations and friends from my past. These locations and friends not only helped raise me but also made me realize that there is so much more I could be. I sought solace in believing that they would always be there, the same ways in which they live in my memory; flawless, eternal and almost god-like until finally I realize that these friends are human, and the locations are physical. All of this was nothing more than an idealist fantasy, made believable through my own childhood ignorance, denial, and wishful thinking.

Today as an adult, I have learned through experience that very few, if anything at all ever stays the same. Locations will change, buildings decay or are reduced to rubble and taken away. Childhood is a mere blink of an eye, and it isn't until adulthood that one realizes this fact and regrets putting aside certain childhood experiences in the hopes that one still had plenty of time. There isn't anything which time hasn't touched, and this past year I made a genuine effort to meet up with old friends and visit the places where I used to roam as a child.

I came to realize that one can become addicted to a certain kind of sadness. For me, it is a

certain form of sadness which results from loss. These include the loss of an old friend, the loss of an irreplaceable possession, or the loss of a location where one had many positive childhood experiences. Accomplishments, and accolades turn bittersweet all too soon, filling our minds and parlance with stories of days gone by, almost reminiscent of old times, resurrected as if the past were suddenly somehow superior to the present.

Then there are regrets. From an incredibly young age, I had regrets, coupled with the classic and typical, trivial and mundane, fears of childhood. There are so many things I wished I could have done, things I should have done, and perhaps a few things that I should never have done. But it is too late now to change the past; all I can do at this point is to say that I'm sorry for everything I have done in my past which was wrong, was a mistake on my part, or worst of all, hurt someone in some way.

People sometimes ask me if I could start my life over again, would I have done things differently? Truth is, if I could do it all again, I would have changed it all.

When I was 16, I had my first taste of love. I thought I knew what love was back then, but what did I really know? I realize now that my this kind of love was the unrequited kind, where I was in love with her, and she did not genuinely love me. She

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only loved things about me. I did not truly realize it at the time.

I made many mistakes back then, and even bigger ones during the next few years, developing an unhealthy reliance upon the notion that I was young and there was an infinite supply of, and seemingly never-ending promises of brand-new days. And with each new day came the promise that my mistakes if not corrected, would certainly be forgotten in time. I was also guilty of believing that I would live forever, now I am not so sure, feeling my body get slowly weakened by the years. Fearing that my time is often short, and I must make amends and make up for lost time.

When I was 18, I would become professionally certified as an Emergency Medical Technician in New York State. Then at 20, I would earn a second certification as a Firefighter. The local newspaper, the *Delaware County Times*, would eventually run an article titled *Thomas Slatin Is Career EMT*, on March 10, 2000. Both certifications would eventually take me far in my young adult life, both professionally as well as to new places in which to roam. I truly believed that I had everything going for me and that I would be an EMT/Firefighter for the rest of my life.

Eventually I was promoted to the position of EMT/Firefighter Lieutenant many years later, but after a few months, I came to realize that I would

much rather pursue my passion for writing and photography. I was younger then, I was reckless and wild, living for the moment instead of focusing on my future goals with the assumption that my dreams would eventually come true if I was doing something productive, even if it were completely unrelated.

On the morning of February 23, 2013, my father passed away at age 97. I was 33 at the time. It was an enormous loss, considering that my father had often joked that he would live forever. In the handful of years before he died, he suggested that he had something that he needed to tell me, which was important, but would need to wait until the time was right. Unfortunately, he never had the opportunity to do so.

Several written works were inspired by his incredible life and of our shared experiences. My favorite piece was entitled *Generation Gap*. In the months to follow, I became increasingly curious as to the contents of an old cardboard box which had been stashed in a back room, which still bore my name. It was part of the contents of my personal belongings from when my family moved out of New York City when I was around age 8. The box contained random belongings, including a handful of cassette tapes which I had record as a young and insatiably curious child.

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I realize now that the older I get, the less impulsive I become, yet the same simple fears still cloud my mind. If I focus enough, I can almost trace the fears to my youth. I remember seeking the advice of my high school English teacher in my senior year, who suggested that I devote my life to writing. Later, that year, I sought out the advice of my art teacher, who taught me an enormous amount about philosophy, yet ironically, very little about art. Both teachers gave me the advice to take a good, concentrated look at where one is in life every so often to appreciate what one has accomplished and to determine and evaluate one's future goals and plans.

Since then, I have made a conscious effort to do this self-assessment every so often, and to do a major self-assessment around every ten years. Around the time I realized that despite all that I have been through, worked hard to overcome, and the things which I accomplished, even if by chance or accident, generally I have not given myself enough credit. Going forward, I decided to always keep my goals in front of me, and never back down. One can be addicted to a certain kind of sadness, but the cure is to find happiness wherever one can.

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Generation Gap

My father was 64 when I was born. That in and of itself created perhaps the greatest generation gap I have ever encountered in my life. In some respects, by him fathering a child so late in life, I may have skipped a generation.

Throughout my life, my father told me that everything in the world was always subject to change, and if anything could change, it would. My father looked down upon my generation and told me that with every new generation came a new set of challenges upon the generation before it. According to him, every generation would be, among other things, less respectful of their elders, much less productive, and far less responsible.

Somehow, he predicted the coming of the so-called generation me: a generation that believed that the world revolved around them. My generation seemed to believe that the world owed them something. Indeed, mine has become a generation that is lazy, uninspired, egotistical, and full of borderline failures. It is a generation that, sadly, embodied every possible attribute that my father predicted it would.

I was raised differently. My parents raised me to do good work, even if I was not being paid or

somehow compensated for it. My father used to tell me that you either do good work, or do not do it at all. I was raised to believe that quality, doing the right thing, personal responsibility and acceptance of others was most important. As time went on, these lessons became personal attributes, which became both a blessing and a curse.

At a young age, I was thrust into the world believing in fairness, equality, and caring about the feelings and needs of others. My depression came as a result of learning that not everything in the world was as my parents told me it would be. The world is full of unfairness, inequality, and fascism. The utopian society my parents made me believe in simply did not exist.

My father looked at life with pessimism. I could not be sure exactly why that was, and at first, he would not tell me. He always said that there was something he needed to tell me, something vitally important that hinged on the right timing. Something, he would say, that he claimed needed to be said before he passed away, but that day never came. He passed away days before he promised, once and for all that the time was right that he would tell me.

The most important conversation was the one I never had with my father. There was an unpleasant feeling that came over me every time I

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brought up the topic. For the last few years of my father's life, I would bring the topic up every now and again. It was almost as if my father were waiting for me to ask the right question of him, almost as if the right question would be the key to solving the seemingly unsolvable mystery.

The morning my father passed away I knew that I would never have the most important conversation with my father. Perhaps the conversation was not as important as he said it was, or maybe it was something simple that needed to be discussed. It may have been a question my father wanted to ask me; some facet of my life that was always a mystery to him, but I seriously doubt it. My parents were very much involved in my life, perhaps too much so, even when I was a full-grown adult.

They say that sometimes things are better left unsaid. However, in this case, I may never know for sure.

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A Little Ghost For The Offering

When my parents moved me to our second house, I was instantly drawn towards a hundred-year-old maple tree in the back yard. As the years went by, the tree became my inspiration, my childhood joy, and the one spot I would always run to whenever I needed a good cry. I would often imagine being hugged and comforted by its sheltering arms, an imaginary comfort throughout all the times I felt alone.

On various occasions, I would talk to the tree, trusting it with my deepest and darkest secrets, my hopes, my dreams, my fears. My tree was trusted confidant, the ideal listener, and a faithful friend that cannot run away. I felt this was a connection that I knew would always be there, patiently waiting, almost anticipating, if not lovingly commanding my return.

The inspiration the tree selflessly gave me eventually lead me to refer to it as my dreaming tree. As I grew, I would lay in the grass beneath the tree and gaze up into its lofty branches. I would dream of how my life and love would be, sometimes for just a few precious moments. On other occasions, it for hours at a time. Remembering my

mother's words when I told my parents I wanted to be a writer and my mom encouragingly asking me what I wanted to write about.

As the years went by, I would take shelter from the hot summer sun sitting at the base of the tree and write in my notebook. When I could not get the words to come out, I would take a break from my writing to stand upon the cluster of roots, sometimes walking in circles around the tree, my hand gently dragging against the aged and weathered bark.

As I grew, my childhood dreams were no longer hollow; I fell in love, and I found my purpose. I went away in hopes of turning my dreams into reality.

I will never forget the day my mom called me on the phone to let me know that my dreaming tree had died, and it needed to be taken down. I begged her to at least leave the stump behind so that I would remember the exact spot where my dreaming tree once stood.

I returned as soon as I could, after the tree was removed, and said to myself, here stood my dreaming tree, staring at the ground covered in fresh sawdust and the lifeless stump surrounded by thriving green grass. Once again, I tried to comprehend and visualize what it would look like if

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it were still there, overcome with emotion as I imagined how the tree had leaned over as it died as if its sheltering arms were reaching out in sadness and sorrow that the young boy had grown and left it behind. The dreaming tree had died and all that was left was nothing more than a figment of my imagination that it was still standing, much like a little ghost for the offering.

I was not there when my father passed away, one February morning. My father dreamed that one day his only child, a son, would be successful, and always insisted that I attend the finer schools to give me the best chance at life. He had kept a childhood drawing I had made of the tree that I so admired, though I will never know for sure if he was ever aware of the true significance. I am sure my father knew how much my dreaming tree meant to me, but of course, he never told me.

The child who grows up an outcast and different is the one who daydreams beneath their own special tree, of castles and kings and fabulous places far, far away, who will ultimately go on to be extremely successful at life.

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My Friend Lived Like Shit And Suffered For His Art

I first met Tim in the fall of 1992 when my parents hired him to paint our house. My earliest memory of Tim was helping him to remove a bee's nest from the side of my parents' house so that he could finish painting. We stayed in touch ever since, and over the years, Tim became a close friend of mine. Tim had always welcomed me to come to see him at his gallery and studio.

Tim was a free spirit who maintained the attitude of a person much younger than his years. As the years went by, I grew to know Tim as someone who often spoke of larger-than-life adventures, travels to wondrous and faraway places, and stories which although true, often defied belief.

I paid a visit some ordinary Sunday morning in late September 2013 to interview Tim at his gallery and art studio. He had anecdotally been interviewed and photographed by the press, though my visit would surely be more in-depth; an ordinary reporter makes a brief appearance, gets the gist of the story, a few photographs, and proceeds to generate an article. My visit was different; I was prepared to spend a few hours talking to Tim, to get

his real story, and to photograph his incredible and original work. Specifically, I wanted to talk to him about his life, and how those life experiences influenced his art and perception of the world.

Walking in, Tim immediately invited me to sit in his favorite chair, handed me a piece of gourmet dark chocolate, shaped like a leaf and dusted with green powdered sugar. A cup of hot espresso would soon follow. I asked why I was offered his favorite chair, as Tim was an eccentric bohemian artist type who had his liberal share of eccentricities. His only response was that I was a “special guest who deserved the V.I.P. treatment.”

I asked how Tim was doing with his art, which began at a very early age, when he excelled in art at Bergen Technical High School, then later attending The School Of Visual Arts in New York City where he studied fine arts.

Tim spoke of his many experiences and adventures. He was a modern renaissance man of sorts; he was a musician, a poet, and above all else, a gifted and talented artist. He opened his own gallery, which would also serve as his studio in 2001, lived like shit and suffered for his art, putting the entire essence of his being into the creation of his artistic vision, yet profiting extraordinarily little from the eventual sales, perhaps just enough to merely

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get by. He would often say that it *would not be art if he made a lot of money.*

Tim told me unbelievably detailed accounts of his adventures, and of being young and, perhaps, irresponsible. One of my favorite stories from the interview was his account of being stuck in rush hour traffic in New Jersey, when he parked his van on the side of the highway, climbed to the top of a billboard, and painted a handlebar mustache on a woman's face that was advertising Crown Royal whiskey. This act of vandalism was the delight to many who were stuck in traffic. Tim stated proudly that, "people were honking their horns and cheering."

He motioned for me to join him near the large plate glass windows at his gallery and attempted to explain the sheer scale of the billboard, explaining that when you get so close to something that big, such as a billboard, it requires a lot of paint to draw a mustache. He then demonstrated with a large dry paintbrush, starting at the front end of his studio and slowly making his way to the back, pantomiming an invisible painting, with a look of sheer reminiscence and nostalgia.

When Tim climbed down from the billboard, he said that he was met by a police officer who was investigating his act of trespassing, then when Tim instructed the police officer to look at what he had

done, the police officer began laughing and let Tim go; no charges were ever filed.

Tim also told me of a solo trip he once took to India, where he stated being absolutely inspired and overwhelmed with the colorful architecture. He reportedly met a man in India who claimed to be able to have had many out of body experiences, at will. Tim also spoke of meeting a beautiful woman in public who stole Tim's heart, and he was crushed to find out that she was married.

When the conversation began to slow, Tim invited me to look around his gallery, filled with paintings on canvasses of various sizes, as well as a few sculptures. He played his piano as I wandered around with my camera, playing an original song he wrote, taking frequent breaks to explain specific pieces of his artwork whenever I took a moment to look at one in detail. Tim's artwork was unique; he used bold colors and generally painted tables and chairs, sometimes in specific scenes. Other times, the tables and chairs were presented in an abstract fashion.

The gallery was Tim's life, and he would often hold open mic nights in exchange for a small donation to help cover operating expenses. Although Tim invited me to come read pieces of my writing during open mic nights, I regrettably never attended.

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Tim passed away suddenly at his home. He was 62 years old, though his legacy, his stories, and his accomplishments are all things for which I will never forget, and I will be forever thankful for him sharing those experiences and memories with me.

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A Typical Friday's Child

I was born on a Friday morning, and I recently returned to the house where I was born I left that house on a Friday afternoon and, almost 30 years later, returned on a Friday, a typical Friday's child. The house was a moment froze in time, as if nothing had changed since I walked out the front door at the tender age of 8. I still remember the dimly lit hallway leading upstairs, the flocked red wallpaper, and the salt and pepper carpeting. Nothing had changed in all these years I spent away, stepping out the front door at age 8 as a small child, raised on promises. I made my way through life, living, growing, and thriving, only to return as a successful adult, the only thing that had changed was me.

I made my way upstairs, feeling the stairway had become narrower than I had remembered it to be, realizing that I had grown and was not a child anymore. The people who used to live upstairs had moved out years ago, and the apartments were now occupied by people my own age. Though the faces and the names had changed, the layout, vibe, and flow of the house had remained the same.

It was the little details which I gravitated towards, relying on my memories of childhood and adolescence in search of nostalgia, the house was now my only connection to the past as my father

had passed away far too soon, and never had the chance to make that final last trip with me back home. It was here where my childhood memories were made. Here was where I learned to walk, to read, and then write. And, here is where I took my first photographic pictures.

My childhood bedroom still had the same red paint on the sliding closet doors. The sliding doors and the shutters above were still fitted with the 1970's style pull tabs, small and round like a tear, and made of brass. Their age had started to show in the decades of oxidation and were no longer the shiny metallic I remembered.

I still remember climbing out of my crib when I was just turning two years old, then the excitement I felt a few years later when my father set up the Texas Instruments T99/4A computer in my bedroom, connected to an old television set. Later the computer would be replaced with a sheet of plywood placed on top of the computer desk, and my father and I would run electric trains. Life was simpler back then, and much easier when I was young.

I had a collection of light up novelty lamps which I stored in a cabinet between the two floor-to-ceiling windows. One was a light-up globe, which my parents threw away when the tiny night light bulb inside of it finally burned out and my father

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destroyed the globe trying to fix it. The other was a full-scale duck lamp which was constructed of cheap plastic and had fake grass painted on the side of the base. When I was a child, I was fascinated with novelty lamps, Legos, and a set of large-scale inflatable dinosaurs which towered over my eight-year-old self.

The marks on the outside of my bedroom door frame were still present from the time when I locked my bedroom door by accident and my father was forced to open the door by sliding a butter knife between the doorknob and the frame. It happened during a weekend football game and the television set happened to be in my room at the time. My dad was in a bit of a hurry to watch it, so he was not exactly careful when he shimmed the door open.

My parents' bedroom was still painted with the same shade of baby blue for the paneling, white for everything else. The cabinets were still the same, and I found it hard to believe that at one time I was able to climb to the top shelf near the high ceiling and lay flat upon the shelf. I was fearless and adventurous back then and liked to climb everything. A few years later, my father came home with an IBM PC Jr., complete with a cutting edge 16-color monitor, only this time it was set up in my parents' bedroom because my father wanted to use it for his work. I would patiently wait all afternoon just to play my favorite game of *Snipes*.

The kitchen floor tile still had a small chip in it when I decided to play with my father's tools, after becoming disenchanted with my toy trucks. I was able to locate the small chip immediately, though small and barely visible, I knew exactly where it was, even if the floor had become much shinier since my childhood as years of cleaning and polishing had helped to hide this accidental imperfection.

The basement still had boxes of my father's possessions, consisting of all kinds of scientific documents which I still do not understand, and some vintage science equipment. My name was still written on the wall in marker, along with some random doodles and scribbles on a metal cupboard, along with a handwritten sign, declaring one of the larger rooms of the basement was my hide out.

My name is written on an interior wall of every house I have ever lived in, along with the year I first lived there. As an adult I have often wondered how my childhood affected the course of my life and seeing the spot where I wrote my name on the basement wall of the house I was born into resulted in more unanswered questions than answers.

Life goes by so fast, and as much as I try to hold onto the memories, it seems that the older I get, the more the memories fade. Now, I realize that nothing stays the same. Time carries on. People live

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and grow. Everything changes day to day despite any of our futile attempts to make sure that things stay the same.

As I walked out the front door, I could almost hear my father whispering something in my ear, but it seemed so inaudible and distant, coming from across the miles. Even though our lives were so intertwined during my youth, I just wish that he had more time. Most of all, I wish he could have been there with me when I finally found my way home.

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Maybe Someday I Will Understand Why

It is the little details I remember; the last things that people say as they are leaving, and the way I feel at specific moments, whether good, bad or somehow inexplicably indifferent. I still remember at the end of the summer when I was 16. I had a crush on a close friend, and I still remember the last thing that she said when she was leaving. I still remember her talking about dreams and rumored desires. Hers: to marry a rich, wealthy man, and be the mother of his children. Mine: to be happy and successful in whatever happened to come my way, and if I ended up being happy, then happiness was what truly mattered.

In the end, it did not matter, she was not paying any attention to my dreams, only hers. In the final moments, before she was to leave for South America as a foreign exchange student, she made me promise to write her, and she said, "Tell me one thing that you will remember about me." Yet, I do not remember my reply, except that I gave her a hug and that was all.

I was younger then, and thought I knew everything. I thought I knew what love was, and I dreamed that one day my life and love would be perfect. I often longed to be an adult, daydreaming

about how everything would be better, as I would be free to come and go as I chose, without any restriction or curfew. Now as an adult I am living a life less wonderous and dreaming of days gone by, wishing that when I was younger that someone had told me the realities and responsibilities of being an adult.

I wish that someone had talked to me about goals and dreams, and how dreams come to fruition slowly, and sometimes in the end, they were not worth the time, effort, or resources needed to achieve them. I wish that someone had told me to dream many different dreams and that it is okay to make time to reevaluate my dreams, or to modify them in order to pursue whatever makes me happy. Growing up, I wished for many things I did not need, and spent too much time chasing hopes and dreams of things that I realize now were unimportant. So much time was wasted, and in hindsight, I feel as if I need to somehow make up for lost time.

I miss the days when we were amused by difference, before we were judged and pigeonholed by the numerical balance of our bank accounts, the arbitrary counts of online friendships, and the number of people who reacted to and/or commented on our status updates. I miss the days before we were taught to judge others and to hate the little imperfections of our bodies or feel ashamed of who we are. Today, we judge our self-

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worth against the commercialized examples of what is considered perfection. Maybe someday I will understand why we believe so steadfastly in the dystopian fallacy that to truly be happy we must somehow change ourselves to achieve unattainable standards to which we are told are ideal.

Recently I was waiting in line at a supermarket checkout stand and could not help but notice that the person in line behind me was a teacher of mine from grade school. She did not recognize me, though I knew exactly who she was. I remembered being a child so many years ago, and how she had always made a mockery of me, telling the class that I was the one who would go nowhere in life, and never amount to anything, and to stand to face the corner during class. I stood in line, occasionally glancing in her direction at first, if by some chance she recognized me, but clearly, she did not.

I thought maybe perhaps I should confront her and let her know that after the many years went by, she was wrong for the trauma she put me through, and that in the end, I was the one who ended up being successful, while she stayed in the same small town, lived a miserable life, and amounted to nothing. But what would I get? Would I get revenge, and to learn by mistake that her abuse, can't be undone, instead be avenged? Those who tried to keep me down caused me to instead be

revered while at the same time, kept them from achieving anything at all themselves.

If someone were to ask me to paint a picture of my life, to offer a snapshot of the way things are, I would likely speak in words like lyrics from a Simon And Garfunkel song. But nobody ever asks, and therefore few people realize the paradox I am living in where I cannot leave, though I know I cannot stay. My only option is to constantly travel in pursuit of my own passion for places where I do not know where I am. I often feel an overwhelming desire to be known and to know others, though sometimes I feel as if I would be willing to travel a thousand miles just to find some place where nobody knows me.

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Belong

Minutes of daylight, as the minutes turn into hours, is the parlance of our time. Every time I look in the mirror, I see myself staring right back at me; a fleeting glimpse of myself going round and round on a carousel cusp of why.

I will never understand why my parents moved me around a lot. I was around eight years old when my parents moved me out of my birthplace of New York City, and I had to change schools for the first time; I was in third grade. After grade seven, my parents moved me to a different school where I completed eighth grade. Grades nine through twelve were spent at boarding school, which I absolutely despised.

Life was supposed to be so much easier when I was young. It was not. I never thought I would ever see the day when I would be forced to trade my childhood heroes for ghosts. I sometimes dream from time to time, of days long ago, straight line from the days when I was still young.

My childhood was filled with a lot of happy times, though well-hidden was the abuse, neglect, abandonment, and molestation at the hands of others outside my family, that nobody ever talked about. Whenever I spoke up, it was often dismissed

as if I was making up a story; I was oftentimes the child ignored. As the emotional scars finally became too much for me to bear, I became complacent in the notion that I am simply mean to those who love me.

My parents had remarkably high expectations of me. When I was young, my parents would often tell me that I should be productive instead of having fun and simply being a child. After giving me a list of respectable career choices, they would ask me what career I wanted to pursue. Being a writer was my lifelong passion, for which Charles Kuralt and Allen Ginsberg often suggested that I pursue as my life's work. As far as my parents were concerned, this was clearly never an acceptable answer, as they would dream of me becoming a doctor or businessman.

Asking a child what they want to be when they grow up is very limiting, as it narrows down the possibilities to career opportunities. The better question is to ask a child who they want to be and what they dream of doing with their life. I did not care much about having a glamorous career or being famous; I just wanted to be happy, to be successful at something I enjoyed, and to belong.

I spent many hours in my parents' back yard, gravitating around a large maple tree in the center of the yard. The tree itself was a focal point in my

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childhood. My friends and I would take turns climbing the tree and sitting within its massive branches. Later, the tree would host a homemade rope swing. Then finally, it provided a quiet spot for me to write in my notebooks. It is not the locations that filled me with love, it was the people who were there with me that made these places truly special and made me feel that I belonged.

It has been decades since my birth, yet it seems that my mind was always troubled with the emptiness and feeling that I simply did not belong. Even when I was making friends, I would feel I was growing close to them. Inevitably, pushing them away when I felt as if I were growing too close. Whenever I felt I might belong, I always feared that one day I would not.

I can be brave, and I can be intense; I can be the hero, and the faithful friend that everyone calls upon in time of need. But I sometimes get tired, and I sometimes get weak. I get sad and I do not speak. I can get so upset that I take out my upset on those closest to me.

I have apologized to almost everyone I know, at least once. I recently made a promise that with the days still left, those who love me will always get nothing less than my absolute best.

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I recently told an old friend how much they truly meant to me growing up, and how they were my childhood hero. I remember how beautiful it was to sit on their couch and cry in front of them for the first time. Despite having friends that genuinely care for me, I never felt as if I ever belonged growing up. For years and years, I roamed, trying to find a place where I thought that I might belong, though I was unsuccessful and never ended up staying anywhere for exceptionally long.

Every person is a gift, and as such are so much more than their jobs, their possessions, or bank accounts. It seems the more we take, the less we become; the fortune of one can only equate with less for some. Love is the greatest thing in life, as are the feelings of the heart.

When I was a child, and later as an adult, I would often ask myself if there would ever come a day when I would finally belong. As the years went by, I longed to belong to anything. When I did not find that ever elusive feeling of belonging, the question of belonging became an even greater issue. But the single most important question in my mind was the one without any answer.

It came upon me like a ghost in the night, scary at first then comforting, much like the feeling of a thousand hugs when suddenly I realized, I belong. I thought of a scream, but instead slowly

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whispered to myself, I belong, followed by a single tear of joy which slowly ran down my cheek, a feeling of calm belonging.

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It Came Without Warning

The wreckage of my past is the war that is never won. Often, I think about all the things that were said to me so many years ago. I would always listen to the negativity, silently as if I were laying down in the wake of someone else's incompetence or insecurities. My elders and a handful of those my parents entrusted with my care labeled me as difficult simply because I was intelligent and quiet.

When I was a child, I was always passive, reserved, and yet completely incapable of truly standing up for myself. Expressing my emotions and finding an outlet for my anxiety became the culmination of my daily fears. Teachers hated me and taking their constant criticism instead of speaking up feels like a punch I never got to land.

I was always a loner. I had one best friend in my childhood, and I foolishly believed that we would be friends forever, and that things would never change. It was not until several decades had passed that we eventually went our separate ways.

I regret wasting my younger years like a kid out in the rain, being reckless and wild, and never staying in one place exceedingly long. I began drifting from one place to another, never knowing where my home was, or how my life and love would

be. I would be making my plans for things that I wanted to come true, then feeling dissatisfied and dismayed by the reality. Although my parents would tell me that I could do anything I set my mind to, life had other plans.

Starting at age 12, I was sent away to summer camp. Boarding school would follow, then a few years of college halfway across the country. Specific time periods in my life can be theoretically measured out with location-based memories, always being tossed around from one place to another, living a life of travel and temporary habitation.

I foolheartedly placed my trust in some people I thought were my friends. I never could have imagined that I would see my 40th birthday, yet I did even after taking so many enormous risks and living a path of near self-destruction.

When my father died one Saturday morning, leaving me with an enormous and completely unexpected number of responsibilities. It came without warning, suddenly as if one day he was here and the next he was gone. Then came the untimely passing of my father-in-law, then a few years later, the loss of two people I considered to be my surrogate grandparents.

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I regret not having the opportunity to tell those who pass away what they truly meant to me, how they helped raise me, and how much I truly admired and respected them. After many decades of them playing a major part in my life, they became my flawless heroes. I sometimes feel selfish in my secret desire for these people whom I had admired almost all my life to be a part of my life for all of time.

After my father's death, there was a longing to go back to my nest; the one and only constant in my life that has always been there and has never changed. I stop by every now and again and revel in the sights and smells once known only to touch the walls, look at my childhood doodles and drawings which remain, which inexplicably survived through the decades I spent away. I have a seemingly insatiable desire to visit the places I used to cling to, all alone, silently as if speaking is unnecessary, only to wander through places I used to call my home, lost in thought. I think about going back to where I attended summer camp, and what it would be like to stand in silence, all alone while a gentle breeze blows against my face while my thoughts float through the grass in the wind. These unhealthy attachments to specific places have somehow taken over and I spend at least five minutes out of every day thinking about them.

I am relentless, persistent, and determined. If there is something I genuinely want in my life, I will

do whatever it takes to achieve my goal. Yet my daily fears remain and so often comes the bitter taste of losing hopes and dreams. I wear my own crown of sadness and sorrow in the realization that the vast majority of all my successes and achievements came to be long after the passing of my father.

In some ways I feel guilty for putting my father through a difficult time growing up, when I was always indecisive, hated school, and wanted nothing more than to pursue my own path in life. My father cried the day I left college and told me that I was making a mistake. Yet what he strongly considered a mistake was what ultimately made me successful and happy. I cried a few years after my father's passing when I heard a sad song on the radio; the lyrics explaining how life was easier when one was young. My father had many plans for me to grow up quickly, become famous and successful, and ultimately follow in his footsteps.

Plans are a curious thing when we are young. We make plans for how our life, love, and careers will be. Somewhere during our lives, we are forced to reevaluate our plans and accept that in life, not all dreams come true. Then, as we approach the end of our lives and our health begins to fail, we make a series of plans, knowing our time is short.

Success is a strange thing in that it is the great equalizer. While a handful of my friends

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found success early on, I found it later in life, while others still have not found it. Despite my education, I cannot find the words to express how often I feel a need to have friends in my life; despite being an introvert who needs a lot of time on one's own, nobody wants to feel isolated or alone.

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Life Is Full Of Questions And It's Tearing Me Apart

I woke up early from a restful night's sleep on an ordinary Tuesday morning. I could not stop thinking about my childhood, and how I always dreamed that one day I would run away. But instead, I stayed, and I suffered through a series of traumatic experiences, when I probably would have been better off leaving and never coming back.

Life is full of questions and it is tearing me apart, as I spend most of my time methodically questioning everything I have ever done in my life. As the minutes slowly turn into hours, I simply cannot let go of the past. Even decades later I am haunted by the thoughts and memories which always seem to commandeer my mind.

I often wonder if someday I will let go, but I know that right now, I am not ready. I thought about publishing the truth which I held on to for so long, but what would I get? Would I get revenge or would the memories, then made permanent and immortalized, cause me more trauma? I grieve in my condition, for I could not find a way to forgive.

Growing up was easy, predictable, and inevitable part of life. Letting go seems to be the hardest part.

It seems as if every December is the time we talk about the past year, while the coming January seems to be the time when one embarks on a new journey as if this time around, we will finally achieve our New Year's resolutions. While in recent years I settled for cliché resolutions, this year I finally decided to make a change. Instead of resolving to lose weight, make more money, or any other seemingly useless resolutions, I decided that I should pursue happiness by putting myself first more often instead of devoting my life to the needs of others while at the same time, forgoing my own. In a sense, I simply care too much and dive too deep for my own good.

Now that I have decided to rid myself of this unhealthy habit of devoting my emotional wellbeing to that of others, without consideration nor expectation of reciprocity, it feels almost as if I have somehow lost a part of myself. If it is indeed so, I will just keep the rest of me.

A Week At Camp

My dream of returning to the summer camp where I spent the summers of my childhood was finally granted. My plans were made suddenly, on a whim in fact, though taking this rare opportunity to return to this place I have always considered to be magical has helped me to realize just how utterly lost I was.

I stood in the middle of one of the large open athletic fields, all alone and listened to the sounds of nature; the singing birds, the wind blowing gently through the trees, surrounded by my own thoughts, and because it is nature's poetry, forever shrouded in mystery.

I walked up to the door of my old cabin, where I had spent my first year as a camper, and the last three as a camp counselor. I walked to the spot where I stayed when I was kitchen staff at age 16, remembering the tree that shielded my first kiss. Then it was off to the more secluded part of camp, known as Wilderness, where I spent the best two summers of my childhood.

Walking back to Wilderness flooded me with emotions and memories, as if the decades that have passed were moments ago. Passing the gate brought me back to a place I held so near and dear

to my heart, where I spent two summers living and having the time of my life with some of my closest and dearest friends, many of whom are closer than family. But this time was different. I returned all alone to the place where I truly felt accepted, appreciated, and loved. It was a place so special, yet whenever someone asks me about it, to me the feelings I have regarding it are truly elusive and indescribable.

It was especially heartbreaking to see that the names written on the walls had finally been covered over; my name, along with the names of my friends were now gone and lost forever. Especially heartbreaking was the loss of the handwritten names of those friends who have been lost and will never return. Those friends whose souls have flown are those who truly deserved to have had their handwritten names preserved. I suppose it might be better this way, as reading their names in the handful of times when I have returned over the years brought up fond memories of happier times and realizing that their souls have flown has only made those memories bittersweet and sad. I much prefer to remember people being special not for how they died, but instead, how they lived.

I slowly made my way to the waterfront, where I sat alone by the lakeshore. It was there that I began to stare at the waves, thinking about my life this far, where I was going, and at that critical

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moment realized that the dreams I made so many years ago had all come to beautiful fruition. If I wanted to continue having an interesting and productive life, I need to start making those picture-perfect maps of how the rest of my life would be. I told myself that I needed to be brave, reveling in the feelings of peace and safety that surrounded me.

I then cast a single stone into the lake and observed the tiny ripples that spread out across the surface, remembering the time that I did this decades ago when I once showed a small child how their actions affected those around them. I like to think that my actions in life were motivated by good intentions, and that I indeed made a difference in the lives of others, despite the doubts that are often abounding.

There have been some people in my life whom I have genuinely liked, though very few people whom I have deeply cared for and loved, whose loss is irreplaceable and will be mourned for the remainder of my life. I often remind myself that it is better to have loved and lost than to never have loved at all.

So much time has passed, yet the profoundly important things in my life have remained mostly the same. I was talking to a friend of mine who has been an integral person at camp ever since I can remember. We caught up on the things that have

changed in our lives since we last saw each other, talking about how time has changed us both. We shared a few beers in the living room of the main house at camp, commenting on how time is a precious and fickle thing that changes everything. It would be grossly reckless for one to subscribe to the notion that there is anything that time will not touch.

Mitch is older now, has a wife and children, and as for me, the child he met at the age of 11 is now older, too. There are very few people in my life that truly know me for who I really am, and Mitch is one of them. I'm reminded of the Walt Whitman poem titled *Among The Multitude*, where Whitman says, "some are baffled, but that one is not—that one knows me".

In life we have many friends, but a true friend is someone who truly knows you for who you really are. Someone that is truly special, and despite the years spent apart, will come back into your life from across the miles as if there was not a single moment lost. I am truly blessed and lucky to have a handful of friends who I can confidently call upon in times of need, like a small boat often lost at sea, these friends have always been the safe harbor. For after my body has been washed and beaten against the rocks after setting sail in the midst of a heavy gale, I have always been lovingly welcomed back to crawl upon their shore.

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Coming back to the place where I attended summer camp has made me realize who my true friends are; these people whom I grew up with, grew close to, and eventually tried to push away. Resistance was futile in the end as they all saw my inner glow, while almost everyone else perceived my glow as see-through. When I was utterly lost in the sea of life, these people all jumped the emotional barricades that I built myself and headed for the sea to save me from drowning in my sadness and sorrow.

Taking a break from daily life gave me a lot of time to think, to dream, to evaluate my life, and to breathe, a welcome and overdue reprieve from my daily fears.

The only thing I know for certain is that my life is always subject to change; as humans, we are always subject to change. I realized that I needed to take life less seriously. Not long before this trip, I met someone who cared for me in a way no one else ever had. She would gladly and without question, put her life and plans aside if it meant my success and happiness.

The most wonderful people I have known in life are those who have forever occupied a sacred place in my heart. But one has come with a love that is both flawless and eternal, and she would soon become my wife.

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The Changes That I Need

With the societal changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, I started to realize what is most important, but perhaps most importantly, I have made note of how this pandemic has changed me personally, and in almost concurrent fashion, I make the changes that I need.

It has been a difficult and trying time during the pandemic. I thought about keeping a daily journal simply to document the spread, though quickly abandoned the idea as there is an enormous amount of press coverage already. Also, outside of the daily news updates, every single day seems identical to the one before. These days are seemingly unprecedented, historic perhaps, and unlike anything my generation has ever experienced. During my lifetime hopefully it will be something that I will not have to face again.

The quarantine, which resulted from a complete failure on the part of the current governmental administration left many people unemployed, and desperate, and has hospitalized and killed countless more.

The Trump administration was a failure from the beginning, garnering much controversy and media attention. But now the pandemic has led to

dire levels and the ridiculousness of Donald Trump's antics are no longer entertaining or humorous.

I have stayed home as much as possible, leaving only to take long walks in the forest, to purchase food from the grocery store, or to take pictures which document the effects of the pandemic.

These unprecedented and critical times have given me a lot of time to think and to prioritize the things that truly matter: my work, my friends, and my family. I came to realize just how much I have going for me, and how fortunate I am, and most importantly, how I should never, ever take any of this for granted.

This crisis, it seems, has made me realize that I have again wished for, and acquired things that I do not need; another unsuspecting victim of the vicious capitalist regime that has most recently contributed to the downfall of modern society.

As I have a keen eye to the future, in my mind's eye, I must also be forever mindful of the past. Lately I have felt an overwhelming need to revisit the places I used to roam, if only for the emotional fulfillment of some sort of closure. Everyone has a story to tell, and my life and experiences are the foundation of the numerous stories I tell.

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I remember being young, perhaps around the age of seven or eight, when my father and his best friend, Arthur Covert, took me to Riverfront Park in Schenectady, New York. Arthur, or *Arturo* as I knew him, brought along a mason jar and collected a sample of water from the Mohawk River. We brought it back to Arturo's house and I was instructed to look at the protozoa swimming around in the water under a microscope.

My father explained that these tiny things that I was seeing were the building blocks of life, and one day a new disease might come from organisms such as these, and forever change society. Of course, being young and naive, I did not believe him.

Unfortunately, I realize now that my father was in fact, telling the truth. Society as we know it has all but come to a complete standstill, resulting partially in an unexpected opportunity to rediscover the things that I once enjoyed, such as listening to the radio and reading articles in the newspaper. Intellectual pursuits, as I refer to them, include reading news articles and well-crafted blogs on the Internet.

I have been reading about all the things I used to think about and on numerous occasions, discuss with my father. These included Scientific theories on Quantum Physics and other things that were all hypothetical at best. I remember being around the

age of 12 and getting scolded by the librarians at the local public library for reading about Scientific theories such as *Buridan's Ass* and *Schrödinger's Cat*, instead of reading books in the juvenile section.

I find it strange how one's perception of time depends heavily on the specific moments in our lives, regardless of the order in which they happen. And yet we base our future upon the cusp of yesterday; the past often dictating my future unless I make the changes that I need.

I Used To Worry About Rain

I awoke at 5 AM suddenly on a cold November morning; my feeble attempts to remain asleep were futile as whenever I wake from a restful night's sleep, my mind begins racing and always will. I spent a lifetime of feeling like an outsider who views life as if looking through a large plate of seemingly impenetrable glass. But I realize now that my entire life, up until this point, I did not know I was lost. Even if I knew that indeed I was lost, I never could have known to what extent that I was lost. The tears I shed were a warning sign often ignored, as I slowly became disenchanted with my life and love. Shadows fall, love hurts, and the perpetual disenchantment becomes a corrosive that does its magic slowly to the point where only bitterness remains.

I used to worry about rain, and I used to be terrified of lightning. When I was a child, I believed that my life would be a total failure if I were not able to figure out a simple math problem in grade school. When you absolutely love someone, everything else seems so unimportant. Regardless of what one loses in life, when we are in love with someone who truly sees and loves us for who we really are, everything else truly is insignificant. When one loses love, it feels as if one's heart is put on display for all the world to see, along with the remnants of their

dreams and life plans tossed into threshers and all torn to pieces.

On this cold November morning, I gazed out my bedroom window, lost in a whirlwind of my own thoughts, my eyes immediately focusing on the fresh layer of frost covering the ground. It was then that I realized that winter was again on its way, and the changing seasons brings with it the profound changes of scenery. Wintertime is a curious time for me, and always has been, as most of the time, I am left to stay inside and succumb to my thoughts and memories, which are always abounding.

On my 41st birthday I finally decided it was time for me to run away, so I packed a suitcase with my essentials, and simply drove away in my car. I am again reminded of my life, and how I would often frame and categorize the eras of my life in suitcases, as until now I never had any place to truly call home. Home is not simply the place where one lives; a home is a place where one truly belongs.

I put millions of miles under my feet, as I navigated my way through life the best way I knew how, but what did I get? Did I achieve success, or gratuitous admiration, or simply validation that I indeed accomplished something in popular parlance which is commonly deemed to be worthwhile?

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I have been a writer all my life, yet until now, my thoughts and words were all too often dismissed as esoteric ramblings; muttered utterances of a madman, whose genius, instead of being revered and admired, was instead shunned.

I had recently taken a trip back to the old apartment I rented just outside the city of Plattsburgh, and afterward drove down the streets I used to patrol during my time as a medic. It has been years since I last visited, and it seems as if everything I once knew has become alien to me as if there is nothing left that time has not changed. I wish that I had some method of preserving the memories of my life, such as placing the details of my life experience into a box and placing it upon a shelf so that I could open it whenever I needed a reassuring bit of nostalgia.

I then returned to the first house I purchased. Everything I wanted and had worked tirelessly for eventually ended up driving me away in sadness and sorrow, leaving me alone and feeling like a stranger that although seen, is never remembered. Finally, as my anchor was finally up, I was swept away in search of a better life, and in doing so, my world was left behind.

One does not realize exactly what they possess until it is suddenly swept away, just as one does not truly find oneself until they are so

helplessly lost that they come frantically crawling upon the shores of solace. One day I knew I would be successful and perhaps even be a star, yet I never anticipated the possibility that I would be a star in someone else's sky.

I still remember all my life; snapshots and memories like scattered pieces of my life and times that constantly play in my mind like flashbacks of pop culture movie clips from 1980's-era movies. I still remember being small, and constantly climbing out of my crib, and my father interrupting his work to find something to pacify my attention.

I remember battling imaginary dragons with plastic swords in the back yard. I remember all my days at summer camp, and the days when my parents would come and visit me and meet my friends. I remember the beginnings and the endings of every single important milestone in my life. I remember every high and every low, every triumph and every failure, falling in love, and feeling heartbreak.

A good friend once asked me, if I could live my life all over again, would I? The truth is, I do not know. I have witnessed the best and worst parts of life, I have delivered babies, and held the hands of people during the last moments of their life. I have met the absolute most wonderful and genuine people and have sat face to face with murderers. I

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have personally witnessed the good, the bad, the fascinating and the mundane, and everything in between. I have experienced brilliance and frustration. All I can hope for is for the story of my life to be told, treasured, and preserved. It is for this reason, I have decided that with the days still left, I will devote the remainder of my life to writing, photography, and love.

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I'm Going Through Changes

Day breaks, the lost boy inside wakes, the birds sing, the wind blows through the trees, and the angels sigh. My mornings in Vermont begin early with the rising sun, my days often occupied with my own pursuits of untamed introspection as I try to unravel the mysteries of life, followed by early nightfall to hang the stars and moon upon, and until I see another day as the sun rises, I am feathered by the moonlight. The promise of another day on the horizon guarantees that the days ahead will never change for me at all.

Introspection is my muse, my preoccupation, my heartbreak. I awoke on a cold December morning remembering my fathers' words as he read me nursery rhymes when I was a small child, "one for sorrow, two for joy, three for girls, four for boys, five for silver, six for gold, seven for a secret never to be told." I remember all the books he used to read to me, chosen at random in the beginning, and as I grew, I began to make my own selections. Winter is a curious season in which life slows down, and I tend to stay inside most of the time, which in turn gives me a lot of time to think and reflect upon the year.

It was in June of 2020, that I wrote *A Little Ghost For The Offering*, which came to fruition during a series of brief almost fleeting moments of

clarity before a handful of traumatic events became so insurmountable that my only solution was to vanish. The article set a precedent, a personal standard of writing I should expect as a derivative of my abilities, and nothing less. It was this article that also became the catalyst to the beginning of my new relationship with Amelia, and when I decided that my previous relationship had finally run its course, I drove to Boston, picked up Amelia, and then together we traveled to Maine for a much-needed vacation.

These are the days I will remember for all my life; the morning sunrise delivers the promise of a brand-new day in which several minutes will be inevitably spent dreaming of distant memories lost and out of time, the echoes of angels that interrupt the silence, curious as to how the years went by in a blur leaving behind snapshots of moments frozen in time. My father's words whispered in my ear as he tucked me in at night are now so inaudible that they seem distant and faded. I woke this morning, not sure if I was still in a dream, as it has been my lifelong experience that the good times never stay, coupled with cheap thrills that eventually fade and lose their luster. Children grow older, friends drift away, and every time I stand before the looking glass, I realize that I am going through changes and that I am growing older, too.

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I still remember being small and sitting on my fathers' knee in the kitchen in front of the refrigerator of my childhood home, and how he would always promise me that I would live a wonderful life. And as the years went by, I watched my father struggle to provide me with only the best things that life had to offer. He spoke of hardships in his own life, not only as a testament to his own personal resilience but as an ominous warning if by some chance his teachings would spare me from misadventure. If someone were to ask me what changed in 2020, the honest legitimate answer would be *everything*.

I concluded after a lifetime of observation, that most things in life will not last forever, and oftentimes what we desire and covet is that which we truly do not need. I held onto the past for far too long in search of deeper understanding, yet it remains impossible for me to definitively express in words how I truly feel. There have been times in my life when I have been too hard on myself, as I try to find not only the answers to questions but perhaps, more importantly, my purpose in life. These are the questions without answers, and if I had to give everything to find them, I wonder just how far I would go.

Lately, I have lost sight of my purpose. When I was eight years old, I thought that my purpose was to be a prolific writer who would one day have the

ability to change the world. At age eighteen I thought that my purpose was to help people, so I became a Firefighter and Emergency Medical Technician. Then at age thirty-eight, I realized that my purpose lies beyond the realm of traditional employment, and I began to chase my passion for creativity.

Today, I have finally decided to devote my life to writing, photography, and love, and in doing so, will show Amelia the love that she deserves and the beauty that she possesses. I had to leave behind everything I once knew so well and start over again somewhere completely new. My dreaming tree has died, I became a stranger to myself and my own life, there was absolutely nothing left for me in New York. One fateful day in 2020, I left, and I probably will not be back. I took an enormous risk, threw my future to chance, and in the end, it became the single greatest decision of my life.

Somewhere I Feel Free

With every setback, regardless of how minuscule or insignificant it truly was, I was reminded of all the stifling comments I endured as a child who was often told that I would never realize any of my dreams. Encouragement from sages became the catalyst that gave me the strength that I needed to eventually defeat the monstrous self-doubt that was created; the monster was the maker of the war inside my head.

My eyes still see colors, I still feel the wind and the rain, and still believe in things unseen. I still see and appreciate the art of everyday life. Yet faced with my seemingly overwhelming success, I was not looking for fame and fortune, nor adorers to show up in hoards; my dream was simply for someone to listen to the stories I tell. Now that I have come to the realization that I belong, I now feel an overwhelming need to belong somewhere I feel free.

Despite my education and subsequent life experience, I still lack the confidence necessary to truly accept that I am ready. I am reminded that it has been far too long since I've seen the ocean and watching near moving ocean water has always been a major source of inspiration for me. Perhaps it is the gentle waves, the smell of salt in the air, or opening

my big eyes to take in the morning sunrise on the horizon. The forest also summons me from another dimension, encouraging me to move on from past failed relationships, to heal my emotional wounds, and to move to a forever place to truly call my home.

Home has remained a fleeting series of glimpses of specific finite periods of time in my life. When I was born, my home was in New York City. When I was a young child, home became the house in Upstate New York, where I lived for many years. When I was an older kid, home was divided between the house where my parents lived, boarding school, and summer camp. As an adult, home became the first house I ever purchased. Now at age 41, my forever home is in a different state; I am grounded, married, and ready for a fresh start.

I still visit my childhood home in New York City, a home I now own. I find it impossible to let go of the memories of childhood. When I am standing in my old bedroom alone, I still feel my father's presence; hearing his voice whispering words of promises for how my life would be. Sadly, my father passed away long before he was able to see his son grow up, have a successful career, and most importantly, finally feel happy.

The culmination of daily fears and postponed dreams gave me no other option than to vanish to save my own sanity. Whatever path one chooses to

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walk in life, there are times in life when one must walk alone. I spent a lifetime thinking about others, putting my own needs and resources aside so that others would have their needs fulfilled. Times have changed and so have I; for once in my life, I am going to start putting myself first, and in doing so adequately satisfy my own needs before helping others.

I have been going through changes. I left the place I called home for well over a decade and starting fresh in a place where nobody knows me. I am scared of what might end up being the best thing I have ever done for myself. When I think about canceling my plans for a fresh start, I needed to remind myself that one must never destroy something that carries with it the potential to thrive. Everything comes around in its time, and my fears are irrational at best as I have nothing to be afraid of.

It was 5 AM on a Sunday morning that I awoke from a deep sleep, rolled over, and decided that I wanted to sleep for a couple of minutes more. In my dreams, I am always the one who takes the fall, and in the daytime hours, I always tread with care so as not to upset the balance of my thoughts and emotions, forever questioning and over-analyzing everything in my life as I try to find the answers to hypothetical questions. I always ask myself, subconsciously, questions that I know I will never

find the answers to. These questions often explode like bombshells of daily fears, letting go of the hurt comes only through acceptance that I cannot change the past.

The waiting has always been the most difficult part of life. Perhaps I need to stop being so impatient as I wait for my plans to come to be. Out of nowhere, and by pure coincidence, I found my forever home. A place where I can write, photograph, dream, explore, and finally experience pure bliss and freedom. But most importantly, it is a place where no one knows me, and I can finally breathe.

Summer Comes For Everyone

This morning I was lost inside a daydream and I was rehearsing a dialogue inside my head. In my dreams, it is always raining and in shades of black and white. The rain wraps fear around me like a blanket, making me feel short of stable, and then finally, it washes me away. These are the days I will remember all my life, the precious and often fleeting moments when there is a story to be told. Amelia takes my hand in an empty room as adventure awaits. Summer comes for everyone; today is the springtime of my life.

Social media became one drink too many and a joke gone too far; the storm that was coming my way was always on the horizon, distant yet forever prevalent and ominous and I knew I was not magnificent. I was born a long time ago, and I know that someday I will die, while the time between is mine, yet I foolishly invested too much of my self-worth in what other people think of me. Social media became an unnecessarily large part of my life. Slowly, more and more people sought revenge against me in response to my successes.

A broken heart forbade to fly, looking at things through tear-filled eyes, contemplating the way things could have been, should have been, and never will be again, and then learning to say

goodbye. Summer comes for everyone, and the pain I am receiving is a reminder that in my life, and all the things I have done have been done with grace and compassion.

I need to know that things are going to look up; my thoughts come to me at night as the world sleeps and the sky is starlit. By morning I am rising tired like the smoldering smoke of a fire that has been left to coals. I write my words of wisdom in the shadow of hope that someone will find insight in them, a signal to the noise like an image often seen on television.

I ended up in a place where nobody knows me. I found love, the sheer magnitude of which was beyond my own comprehension. But now I am here, and I do not know why. I asked Amelia if she would stay with me, would she be my love. Now I am something. On the occasions where we are apart, our souls speak from across the miles, now as our lives are intertwined, our flames burn as one. I am galvanized by her presence, nothing else matters and I want to write her name in the sky.

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About The Author



Thomas Slatin was born and raised in New York City. He started writing and taking photos at the age of eight. In 1996, Thomas designed and published his first personal website, and TomSlatin.com was established in July 1998. He has been employed as a freelance writer, photographer, and website designer in various capacities since age 18.

Thomas Wilson Pratt Slatin

In July 1998, Thomas was certified as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). Then, in 2001, he became a certified Firefighter. He served 18 years in the fire service, while also pursuing writing, photography, and website design part-time, shortly after being promoted to the rank of Fire & EMS Lieutenant in 2016, Thomas left the Fire and EMS service to pursue a lifelong dream of being a self-employed writer and photographer.

In 2020, Thomas moved to his forever home in Vermont with his partner Amelia Phoenix Desertsong. Together, they travel around New England photographing the small-town life and historical landmarks the region has to offer. They plan to travel as much of the United States as possible collecting photos and accounts of America's mysteries and stories. One day, they hope to also travel the world in search of unique perspectives shared through writing and photography.

Besides enjoying time with his partner, family, and friends at his Vermont estate, Thomas is a major railroad enthusiast and avid outdoorsman. Thomas also enjoys geocaching and he has branded trackable geocoins that travel many thousands of miles all over the world.

Thomas is currently a contributing photographer for Canva, EyeEm, and Getty Images.

The Only Child Of An Atomic Engineer

His writing focuses on creative nonfiction about unique life experiences. Meanwhile, his photography focuses on abandoned locations, urban exploration, and adventure photography. His writing and photography is also featured in numerous media venues, which you can find on his blog. He has also published a photography book called Entropy.